

# DIGITAL FATIGUE & DETOXING

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Our digital devices are an increasingly intertwined part of our daily lives and routines. We often start the day perusing our notifications, spend the afternoon staring at our desktop in the workplace, and finish the evening with a social media scroll.

The average Australian and New Zealander spend five hours per day on their phones alone.<sup>1</sup> Technology provides many benefits and conveniences, but researchers believe this excess consumption comes at a cost to our mental and physical wellbeing.

Digital fatigue is a state of exhaustion and disengagement occurring after using digital devices for prolonged periods of time or navigating many devices at once. The amount of blue light emitted from devices can interrupt sleep patterns leading to tiredness, eye strain and damage.<sup>2</sup> The long periods of time spent sitting can cause sore and stiff muscles, and the toll of virtual interaction and information overload can cause difficulties in concentrating.

Researchers have also pointed to the blurring boundaries of the workplace and home, where many take the demands of their career home with them on their devices and experience difficulties switching off.

In the journal article, 'The Digital Burnout Scale Development Study', Pinar Erten from Bingol University in Norway states that the 24/7 access to devices, and the ability to do business outside of traditional hours, leads many workers into a "digital burnout that they do not know when to stop."

"Irresistible information flow and constant accessibility are harmful to people's health. The purpose of digital connection disappears, and stress increases," Erten writes.<sup>3</sup>

Digital fatigue has intensified since the beginning of the pandemic. A significant cause was the increased screen time in lockdown, which Dr Lauren Arundell from Deakin University, School of Exercise and Nutrition Sciences found to escalate by 26 hours in children per week, and 14 hours in adults.<sup>4</sup>

"Excessive screen time in childhood increases the risk of obesity, cardio-metabolic disease risk factors, myopia, poor mental health, lower social skills, school attainment, and lower social connectedness. Similar associations are noted amongst adults," Dr Arundell wrote.







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The increased dependency on video conferencing tools to replace loss of face-to-face meetings led to the infamous 'Zoom Fatigue'. A study using a sample size of more than 10,000 people to analyse the causes and impacts of this, found 'nonverbal mechanisms' to be responsible. These include the feeling of being trapped due to a lack of ability to move from the screen, hyper gazes from a grid of staring faces, and the cognitive overload of producing and interpreting nonverbal cues over video calls.<sup>5</sup>

The study also found digital fatigue to impact women more than men, regardless of ways of the zoom background or personality type. They noted that this is significant to understand due to existing inequities and the pressure these place upon women's lives. Australian women engage in 30% more unpaid care work (domestic tasks such as cooking, cleaning, home maintenance, and child care) than men a week.<sup>6</sup> According to the

McKinsey Institute, women are already experiencing unprecedented levels of general burnout in the workplace, almost double the rate of men.<sup>7</sup> A separate study of working parents found that working Mums are 28% more likely than working Dads to experience burnout.<sup>8</sup>

'Digital detoxes', defined as periods of time spent refraining from technology, are growing in popularity. Retreats are popping up around the globe, promising luxurious opportunities to recharge. However, escaping to the woods or tropics isn't your only option to disconnect.

In the workplace, opt for old-school note-taking measures or print out some of your work to give your eyes a rest from your screen. Skip the Netflix binge and switch off with a book, engage with your children by colouring in or doing some tactile paper crafts. Working, thinking, viewing the world in the 'physical' is a switch off and balance we all need.

Sources:

<sup>1</sup> RNZ, 'People devote third of waking time to mobile apps', 2022

<sup>2</sup> Lixar, 'Managing Digital Fatigue', 2021

<sup>3</sup> İnönü University Journal of the Faculty of Education, 'The Digital Burnout Scale Development Study', 2020

<sup>4</sup> International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, 'Changes in Families' Leisure, Educational/Work and Social Screen Time Behaviours before and during COVID-19 in Australia', 2021

<sup>5</sup> National Library of Medicine, 'Nonverbal Mechanisms Predict Zoom Fatigue and Explain Why Women Experience Higher Levels than Men', 2021

<sup>6</sup> Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 'Unpaid Care Work and the labour market', accessed 2022

<sup>7</sup> McKinsey Institute, Women in the Workplace Report, 2021

<sup>8</sup> Maven 'Parents At The Best Workplaces', 2020